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PROBLEMS OF IMMIGRATION

By HONORABLE FRANK P. SARGENT,
United States Commissioner of Immigration

No question of public policy is of greater importance or affects so closely the interests of the people of this country for the time present and to come as that of immigration. It presents both a practical and a sentimental side. It cannot be dealt with as other public issues. It does not deal with the question of revenue. Its subjects are not inanimate like merchandise; they are human beings. They have aspirations, hopes, fears and frailties. The methods by which other laws are administered cannot, with regard to such a subject, be resorted to in the enforcement of the immigration laws. These laws, be it remembered, with one exception, are not laws of exclusion, but laws of selection. They do not shut out the able-bodied, law-abiding and thrifty alien who seeks to make a home among us, and to help at once his individual condition and the welfare of his adopted country. To such it is the part both of policy and good government, as well as of justice and fair play, to extend the hand of welcome. But it has long since been learned in the school of practical experience that the universal welcome which should be extended by a free people to those of oppressed nations, should be restrained by considerations of prudence and a regard for the safety and well-being of the country itself. Hence it has become an established principle of this Government to frown upon the efforts of foreign countries and of interested individuals and corporations to bring to the United States, to become burdens thereupon, the indigent, the morally depraved, the physically and mentally diseased, the shiftless, and all those who are induced to leave their own country, not by their own independent volition and their own natural ambition to seek a larger and more promising field of individual enterprise, but by some selfish scheme, devised either to take undue advantage of some classes of our own people, or for other improper purpose. That such a policy is a wise one, as well as obligatory upon the Govern-

ment of this great country, is too obvious to require elaborate argument.

The total estimated alien immigration to the United States, from 1776 to 1820 was 250,000. The arrivals, tabulated by years, from 1820 to 1903, aggregate 21,092,614, distributed among the foreign countries as follows:

Netherlands.....	138,298
France.....	409,320
Switzerland.....	211,007
Scandinavia, which includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden.....	1,610,001
Italy.....	1,585,477
Germany.....	5,100,138
Austria-Hungary.....	1,518,582
United Kingdom (Great Britain and Ireland).....	7,061,710
Russia.....	1,122,591
Japan.....	64,313
China.....	288,398
Other countries such as Roumania, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and Poland.....	1,984,779

The total number of arrivals for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 1903, was 857,046, divided as follows:

Netherlands.....	3,998
France.....	5,578
Switzerland.....	3,983
Scandinavia.....	77,647
Italy.....	230,622
Germany.....	40,086
Austria-Hungary.....	206,011
United Kingdom (Great Britain and Ireland).....	68,947
Russia.....	136,093
Japan.....	19,988
Other countries, such as Roumania, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and Poland.....	64,113

This is the greatest number that ever applied for admission in a single year. The nearest approach to this was in 1882, when 789,000 were admitted.

The character of the arriving aliens, however, during the past years differs greatly from that of 1882 and the years previous. Since the foundation of our Government until within the past fifteen years practically all of the immigrants came from Great Britain and Ireland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries and were very

largely of Teutonic stock, with a large percentage of Celtic. Fifteen millions of them have made their homes with us. In fact, they have been the pathfinders in the West and Northwest. They are an intelligent, industrious and sturdy people. They have contributed largely to the development of our country and its resources, and to them is due, in a great measure, the high standard of American citizenship.

The character of our immigration has now changed. During the past fifteen years we have been receiving a very undesirable class from Southern and Eastern Europe, which has taken the place of the Teutons and Celts. During the past fiscal year nearly 600,000 of these have been landed on our shores, constituting nearly 70 per cent. of the entire immigration for that year. Instead of going to those sections where there is a sore need for farm labor, they congregate in the larger cities mostly along the Atlantic seaboard, where they constitute a dangerous and unwholesome element of our population.

About 50 per cent. of the 196,000 aliens who came from Southern Italy during the past year were unable to read or write any language, and the rate of illiteracy among the rest of these Mediterranean and Slavic immigrants ranges from 20 per cent. to 70 per cent., while among the Teutonic and Celtic races the rate of illiteracy is less than 1 per cent. to 4 per cent. This change which has taken place during the past fifteen years has resulted in raising the average of illiteracy of all aliens from about 5 per cent. in former years to 25 per cent. at the present time.

What I desire, however, to call attention to, I have already indicated, and that is that in the enforcement of the immigration laws, since the subjects thereof are human beings, the treatment is two-sided. One-half of the work incumbent upon the Government has been done when those whose presence would militate against the interests of the people of this country have been detected and returned to their homes. Under the direction of the Bureau of Immigration all aliens are carefully examined by immigrant inspectors and surgeons of the Marine Hospital Service at the ports of entry for the purpose of rejecting those not admissible under the provisions of the immigration laws. During the past year more than 1 per cent. of those who applied for admission were rejected

and returned to the countries whence they came. The total number thus debarred during the year was 8,769, for the following causes, viz.:

Paupers.....	5,812
Afflicted with a loathsome or a dangerous contagious disease.....	1,773
Contract laborers.....	1,086
Convicts.....	51
For all other causes.....	47

In addition thereto 547 were deported who were found to be in the United States in violation of law.

There still remains the larger question, the question that more individually and vitally affects the interests of our people. What shall we do with the thousands that are admitted? Shall they be allowed to form alien colonies in our great cities, there to maintain the false ideals and to propagate the lawless views born thereof as the result of their experience—foreign not alone from their origin geographically, but foreign as well to this country in their ideals of human liberty and individual rights? To answer this question affirmatively is simply to transfer the evils which may be admitted to exist in foreign countries to our own shores. Immigration left thus is a menace to the peace, good order and stability of American institutions, a menace which will grow and increase with the generations and finally burst forth in anarchy and disorder. It is thus necessary, as a measure of public security, to devise and put in force some means by which alien arrivals may be distributed throughout this country and thus afforded the opportunities by honest industry of securing homes for themselves and their children, the possession of which transforms radical thinkers into conservative workers and makes all that which threatens the welfare of the commonwealth a means to preserve its security and permanency.

The Department of Commerce and Labor, through the Bureau of Immigration, should, in my judgment, furnish information to all desirable aliens as to the best localities for the profitable means of earning a livelihood, either as settlers, tradesmen or laborers. The States and Territories which need immigration should file with the Department such evidence of the advantages offered to aliens to settle in localities where conditions are favorable, so that the tide of immigration will be directed to the open and sparsely settled country. That the Bureau of Immigration should be the

medium of distributing the aliens is to my mind as much of a duty as it is to decide to whom the right to enter shall be given.

There are confined in the penal, reformatory and charitable institutions of the eleven States from Maine to Maryland, including Delaware, 28,135 aliens. The Irish, Slavs, Germans, Italians and English make up 85 per cent. of the total. There are 9,390 Irish; 5,372 Slavic; 4,426 Germans; 2,623 Italians, and 2,622 English. In the State of Pennsylvania there are 5,601 aliens confined in these institutions, 90 per cent. of whom are of the same five races in the following numbers: 1,772 Slavic; 1,218 Irish; 1,078 Germans; 673 Italians, and 423 English.

As I have already stated, the question has two sides. The other side is the humanitarian. It refers to the claims upon our consideration of alien arrivals as fellow beings. This side equally demands of a just and humane government the adoption of practical methods for such a distribution of these people as I have already indicated. On their own account, and in consideration of their ignorance and helplessness, they should be taken out of the great centers of population, where restricted space compels them to live together in a very unhealthful and unsanitary condition, and where competition for the means of existence forces them to prey upon each other and upon American citizens engaged in the same pursuits by a system of underbidding for work, a condition which reduces the cost of labor and lowers the standard of living. Such colonization, furthermore, by its consequent disregard of sanitary laws, threatens the physical health of the communities affected.

I cannot, in the brief space at my disposal, do more than merely advert to the principal features of this great governmental policy regulating immigration, a policy whose administration, to some extent, has been confided to my hands. I feel with every day of added experience the gravity of the interests involved, and that it calls for all that is best and highest in ability and moral stamina to accomplish the best results. It would be impossible for any right-minded man—it certainly has been to me—to undertake such a task without soon learning how much it exacts. In every moment of doubt or uncertainty, however, I have endeavored to be governed by that fundamental principle of our Government

which recognizes the sacredness of right and individual opportunity, whether the person affected has fortunately been born under the shadow of the stars and stripes, or whether, when the opportunity comes to him to exercise his own volition in selecting a home for himself and his children, he seeks that protection. Exact justice to all, irrespective of present or previous condition, is the rule by which I have endeavored to enforce the immigration laws, bearing in mind always that in any conflict of interests between my own people and those of other countries my primary duty is so to act that the balance will incline in favor of the citizens of this country, in whose service I am employed.